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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that teachers and students take a serious look at the career opportunities being offered by industrial television. A video utilization survey of 380 U.S. corporations revealed that 25% of the corporations maintained their own television studio production facilities, and that another 12% had definite plans for establishing one. The kinds of jobs available in the industrial television field are described, and internship is discussed as an effective means of preparing students for a career in industrial television. The establishment of cooperative programs with industrial television facilities is recommended. It is concluded that it is time for educators to help insure that the preparation of interested students will best match the future needs and requirements of industrial television. (TS)

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"The Exciting Future of Industrial Television"

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of
the Broadcast Education Association

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The use of television within industry is not a totally new phenomenon. AT&T, for example, began using television for internal communication back in 1965. Certainly, other companies have been working with basic video equipment during the past few years. But what is new in the seventies, is the tremendous increase in the number of corporations, from virtually every sector of American industry, that are now taking a serious look at the possibilities and advantages, not of just buying a camera, recorder and roll-cart, but of actually establishing full-scale in-house television studio facilities. And some companies are doing much more than simply looking. Xerox, for example, decided to incorporate a $1.5 million television production and distribution system within its recently completed International Corporate Training Center in Leesburg, Virginia. AT&T maintains three major television production studios on the East Coast, plus over 60 smaller facilities throughout the Bell System. Sears, Standard Oil of Indiana, State Farm, John Deere, Merrill-Lynch, McDonnell-Douglas, Bank of America, Texas Instruments and McDonald's are but a few additional U.S. corporations that have to date made major commitments to in-house video. Corporate production activities range from employee training units of varying complexity, to weekly and even daily closed-circuit employee news programs, to perhaps the ultimate at present, the use being made by AT&T of a "video conference call," consisting of a simultaneous television feed to a potential total of thirty corporate locations throughout the U.S. with the capacity for live audio response from all points within the network. Activities such as these are expensive and may well be the province of only the very largest of companies. Certainly few firms can match AT&T's capability for nationwide interconnection. And, of course, not all corporate video users are blessed with million-dollar production facilities. In fact, many companies participate in video via black-and-white cameras, half-inch recorders, small studios and few if any full-time production employees. Such extremes certainly raise questions about the precise status and make-up of industrial TV development in this country.

In an effort to come up with some answers, I initiated a video utilization survey last year at this time, involving 500 U.S. corporations. The sample was assembled from the Forbes "500" lists on the basis of revenue and representation of a variety of industry sectors. Three hundred and eighty questionnaires were returned and usable, for a 76% response rate. So much for the mechanics. What were the findings? The survey revealed that 95 (or 25%) of the responsing corporations maintained their own television studio production facilities.

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Of the 285 companies indicating no such facility, 39 did note, however, that they had either begun talking about or actually had definite plans for establishing a studio facility. Of the sampled corporations with video production facilities, just over half were engaged in manufacturing, followed in order by financial institutions, utilities, retailers, natural resource and transportation companies.

To give you some feeling for a typical operation, the average video facility operated with 4 1/2 full-time staff positions on a weekly production schedule of 18 hours. Forty-six percent of the studios were equipped with color cameras. Perhaps worth noting with regard to video tape, twelve of the companies surveyed indicated two-inch quad capability. Summarizing from this and other data submitted, the average corporate television facility is: reasonably well staffed, in use almost 20 hours a week, fairly well equipped and very versatile in terms of production services offered. Although this description represents the industrial television situation as it stood a year ago, the weakened economic situation during the intervening twelve months has imposed a limited growth situation on most video users and has even caused some smaller and marginal operations to close-up shop completely. For that reason, the status and make-up of industrial television at the present time remains largely as described.

With this overview of the industry in mind, what then can we look for in the years ahead and how will it relate to our students? In order to insure accurate information on the present and future situation for industrial television, nine managers of active corporate video systems were recently contacted by phone and the 30-plus companies indicating probably future studio construction on last year's survey were surveyed again by mail. Taking a look first at the industrial television situation predicted for the remainder of the year, the consensus feeling among the corporate managers seemed to be one of "restrained enthusiasm." Restrained because companies are still feeling last year's budget crunch. Enthusiasm because it appears to be the remnants of a weak economy rather than a lack of acceptance, that currently prevents management from making either an initial video commitment or expanding already existing operations. Assuming the rebirth of a vigorous economy, this is indeed good news for the industrial TV industry and for students beginning to look in that direction for future employment. With regard to the holding pattern experienced by industrial television last year, Marvin Winchester, Director of Audio Visual Services for State Farm, feels at this point that "we've turned the corner," on the general slow-down in corporate video development. Turning out only 19 programs during all of 1975, State Farm has thirty programs produced or in production already in 1976. And more good news: State Farm hopes to add six people to its audio-visual staff by year end.

On last year's survey, the John Deere Company was one of only three to indicate average studio utilization of forty hours per week. Certainly that level of production activity is both admirable and worthy of note. This year, Deere's Video Coordinator David Patterson reports that studio use is now running between 50 and 60 hours per week. During 1975, Deere completed a total

of 67 programs. The company has already this year accumulated a production backlog in excess of 80 programs. Phillips Petroleum is just now bringing its in-house video facility on-line and already the Phillips remote location and studio production backlog stands at 60 programs. For these and other companies already committed to video, there are definite signs of present and future good health.

As might be expected, the recent economic situation has had some negative impact on corporate video development. Specifically, it has altered the thinking of the companies surveyed that were last year considering or actually committed to the establishment of in-house studio facilities. Based on the recent follow-up survey of these companies, most of the respondents have either extended their target date or temporarily shelved consideration entirely. For the most part, systems projected to be on-line for 1976 have been postponed. Collective responses do seem to indicate, however, the likelihood of considerable new studio construction over the next two to three years.

To summarize then, existing video operations are generally shaking off the effects of the recent economic slow-down and are clearly back on an expansion track, both in terms of production activity, the purchase of new equipment and, in some cases, even hiring. Studio facilities on the drawing board in 1975 are, for the most part, still there, but with the definite likelihood that considerable construction will be taking place during the next few years.

Typically, new construction creates additional employment. But because of the slow-down and postponements, the job situation in industrial TV for this year's June graduates does not appear to be overly encouraging, although some openings are anticipated later on in the year as the recovery in video operations continues to pick up momentum. Additional survey work now in progress should result in the availability of more precise job market information during the coming weeks. Employment prospects over the next few years, given a strong economy, are predicted to be very good for people with the right kinds of credentials.

Well, what kinds of jobs and what kinds of people are we talking about? The key future employment needs in industrial TV appear to be three in number: technicians, producer-directors and writers, and not necessarily in that order. Although there will be a continuing need in the industry for top calibre technicians (it can reportedly take up to six months to find one now), as the studio facilities become completed, and the production hardware is installed and operating, the greatest demand will be for software people: the producers, the directors and especially the writers. In the words of John Connelly, Manager of Audio Visual Facilities at Sears, " . . . one of the biggest lacks in industrial TV is writers." It seems like "nobody wants to write."

Now, as you might suspect, industrial TV operations will be most interested in individuals who can comfortably wear a combination of production "hats." Take directing for example. Kenneth Evenson, Director of Communications Services at McDonald's, candidly indicated, "I can't afford a director who does nothing but direct." Again, John Connelly from Sears: "In industrial TV, the person

who directed last week is running a camera this week. It's very important for these people to be able to do other things in the studio. . ." Versatility, then, rather than narrow specialization, is an important key to employment in industrial television. And there are some other qualities that video managers will increasingly be looking for in prospective job applicants. They'll be searching for individuals who not only exhibit production versatility in television, but who can apply those varied skills to other visual media as well. "In a corporate situation, a producer/director/writer cannot be just TV," explains V.E. Johnson, Director of Audio Visual Services at Standard Oil (Ind.). "Our people really have to be able to work in whatever medium the communication problem, the objective of the client, and the budget dictate. Some knowledge of the other media makes an individual much more valuable as an applicant for corporate work." I hate to have to mention this next one, but managers have indicated that they will increasingly be looking for applicants with some previous production or writing experience, either in school or preferably within another industrial TV operation. I'll deal with this reoccurring experience criterion in a moment. Finally in the area of hiring requirements, video managers will be giving more favorable consideration to people who have an awareness of corporate structure and operation, a feeling for, and an acceptance of, the business environment.

Now, what can we as educators be doing to help insure that the preparation of interested students will best match the future needs and requirements of industrial television? Perhaps the one complaint common to almost all of the video managers contacted is the rather widespread, as they see it, lack of hands-on production experience among college applicants. This is a continuing problem and most of us are fully aware of it. An obvious first step is to work to insure maximum student exposure to, and actual use of, existing audio-visual production facilities within our respective schools. Often tight budgets prevent the acquisition of sufficient up-dated equipment or even any equipment at all. But whether you are or are not having trouble securing enough studio work for your students, let me suggest an alternate source of experience. That alternative is the internship. Internship is not a new word to any of you, yet perhaps the concept of a cooperative program with an industrial television facility is somewhat new. Well, it's fine to make such suggestions, but how do the corporate video people feel about this kind of cooperative training venture? I'm happy to report that the reaction to this subject was most favorable. Each of the managers recently contacted was either already conducting an intern program or was favorable disposed to establishing one. American business has not always been held in the highest esteem by college students. Corporations are clearly aware of this fact and, as such, are anxious to pursue programs that will expose young people to the business environment. This feeling, plus, I believe, a sincere desire to help train capable media students for possible industrial TV careers, has resulted in a positive response on the part of these video managers. And, in their opinion, this positive attitude toward internships is probably quite widespread. May I suggest that you contact corporate video users in your state or region and begin talking about internship possibilities. As the industrial TV field grows and becomes increasingly more sophisticated, the need for some form of previous production experience will become all the more critical.

Moving now to another area deserving of our attention. As indicated earlier, there is a definite demand building in industrial TV for good writers. Most of the managers contacted made specific reference to this fact. Students with demonstrated writing talent should, in turn, be made aware of this demand and encouraged to continue the refinement of their capabilities.

In addition to providing opportunities for hands-on experience, and the development of writing skills, we need to encourage students interested in industrial TV careers to enroll in the types of courses that will give them the opportunity to develop multi-media competencies. Industrial TV producer/director/writers are as likely to be working with film, film strips, and slides as they are with video tape. And then, beyond having production skills in a variety of media, there is another need in industrial TV, perhaps somewhat unique anymore, and that is the ability to carry an assigned program project all the way through, from original concept development to polished completion. Ronald Shaner, Northern Indiana Public Service Company's Training Materials Coordinator, reports that many of the applicants he has interviewed have had some isolated production skills but "few have had an experience that required them to be totally responsible for the entire project." Given this input, it is apparent that we need to begin making these kinds of total production experiences available to interested students. And finally, we need to encourage future industrial TV candidates to be more aware not only of the specific status and activities of the industrial TV field, but also more aware of the general American business environment and structure, within which corporate video presently functions. This can be handled either through our own class discussions or through selected course work in business.

These are some of the kinds of things we need to be doing as we begin focusing on this new career direction. And it is indeed a career direction. Industrial television is fast becoming more than just a place to look for work when nothing seems to be available in commercial TV. It is developing rapidly into a demanding, creative, vigorous industry, fully capable of standing on its own and, thus, one increasingly capable of competing on an equal footing for bright, young, competent studio and management personnel.

Although industrial television is experiencing only limited growth at the present time, there are definite signs of near-term improvement, and sufficient evidence does exist to support a prediction of tremendous expansion, in both new and existing facilities, during the next few years. And with in-house studio saturation among only the very largest of corporations sitting presently in the area of 25%, there is certainly great potential for sustained growth in industrial television for the foreseeable future. In addition to the low level of saturation, another positive growth factor can be found in a rapidly developing managerial attitude. Corporate management is generally becoming more and more convinced of the need for communication, internal as well as external, and of the key role that video can play in meeting that need. "I think the times are going to force more communication,"

indicates W.A. Buckles, Video Communications Supervisor for Phillips Petroleum. "Employees are now wanting to know more information than they ever did before. All major companies want very badly to communicate and . . . they're looking for ways to do it." Although management may still be naive about the cost involved with starting and maintaining a video facility, it is becoming much less naive about the need for video communication. Rod Paine, Xerox Corporation's Manager of Audio Visual Services, feels that "management is become more sophisticated" when it comes to video. "They're no longer preoccupied with why color vs. monochrome, why reel-to-reel vs. cassette, those kinds of things." Management "realizes that video is here and that is is effective." With the increasing acceptance of this attitude, tremendous future growth would seem to be virtually assured.

In my rather obvious enthusiasm for this area, I don't mean to suggest that industrial TV is the field for everyone, anymore than commercial TV is the right place for all of our production students. But what I am suggesting is that we begin to take a serious look at the career opportunities being offered by industrial television, especially in light of the apparent leveling off or even decline in production employment at the local television station level. A leveling off that has occurred while our own enrollment numbers continue to increase.

Growth prospects for industrial TV in the years ahead are excellent. Prospects for the employment of our students within this emerging industry are excellent as well. Let us begin to make the necessary adjustments in our programs, and in our thinking, that will enable qualified students to participate more fully in the exciting present and future of industrial television.